

Message Text

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DRAFTED BY S/CCT:JTBROWNE:IJG

APPROVED BY S/CCT - ROBERT A. FEAREY

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 156942

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QTE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 156942 TOSEC 050114

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TAGS: PINS

SUBJECT: REPORTED ABDUCTION OF COLONEL ERNEST R. MORGAN.

1. FOLLOWING ARE THE ESSENTIAL FACTS ON THE REPORTED JUNE 29 ABDUCTION OF COL. MORGAN IN BEIRUT.

2. COL. ERNEST R. MORGAN, ASSIGNED TO THE HQS OF THE JOINT US MILITARY MISSION FOR AID TO TURKEY, DISAPPEARED IN BEIRUT ON JUNE 29, WHILE TRANSITING THE CITY ON HIS WAY BACK TO ANKARA FROM PAKISTAN, WHERE HE HAD BEEN ATTENDING CENTO EXERCISES. COL. MORGAN ARRIVED IN BEIRUT FROM PAKISTAN ON PA 001 THE MORNING OF JUNE 29 AND WAS SCHEDULED TO DEPART FOR ANKARA ON THE SAME FLIGHT THE MORNING OF JUNE 30. PAN AMERICAN HAD MADE ARRANGEMENTS FOR HIM TO OVERNIGHT AT THE NEW MELKART HOTEL. ABOUT 6:00 P.M. ON THE 29TH, COL. MORGAN ENGAGED A TAXI TO TAKE HIM BACK TO THE
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AIRPORT. ACCORDING TO THE TAXI DRIVER, COL. MORGAN HAD HIM

WAIT OUTSIDE THE AIRPORT WHILE HE BOUGHT SOME READING MATTER. ON THE RETURN DRIVE TO THE CITY, THE TAXI WAS STOPPED BY ABOUT 20 ARMED MEN AT THE AIRPORT CIRCLE. COL. MORGAN WAS TAKEN AWAY AND THE TAXI DRIVER RELEASED. THE EMBASSY LEARNED OF COL. MORGAN'S DISAPPEARANCE JUNE 30. SINCE THEN, IT HAS BEEN WORKING CLOSELY WITH APPROPRIATE

LEBANESE AUTHORITIES TO LOCATE HIM AND EFFECT HIS RELEASE. COL. MORGAN IS 43 YEARS OLD. HIS PERMANENT RESIDENCE IS IN PETERSBURG, VIRGINIA, AND HIS FAMILY IS AT HIS POST OF ASSIGNMENT IN ANKARA.

3. MOST RECENT REPORT (USDAO BEIRUT 405, JULY 2, BEING REPEATED TO YOU) INDICATES THAT EMBASSY STILL HAS NO INFORMATION ON MORGAN'S WHEREABOUTS.

4. A DEA OFFICIAL AND, SEPARATELY, THE AMBASSADOR'S CHAUFFEUR WERE RECENTLY HELD BY PALESTINIANS, AND AN FSO BY UNIDENTIFIED PERSONS. ALL WERE RELEASED UNHARMED WITHIN 48 HOURS. IN THE CASE OF THE AMERICANS AT LEAST, THE ABDUCTIONS APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN UNPREMEDIATED. HOWEVER, THE INTENSE FIGHTING THAT PREVAILED AT THE TIME OF MORGAN'S APPARENT ABDUCTION GIVES CAUSE FOR MORE CONCERN IN HIS CASE.

5. IT APPEARS TO US THAT PROSPECTS OF COL. MORGAN'S EARLY AND SAFE RELEASE WILL BE ENHANCED IF HIS ABDUCTION IS GIVEN MINIMUM PUBLICITY, AVOIDING PARTICULARLY INFORMATION WHICH WOULD SUGGEST TO THE ABDUCTORS THAT MORGAN IS A FIGURE OF IMPORTANCE FROM WHOM THEY MIGHT BE ABLE TO SECURE VALUABLE INTELLIGENCE AND FOR WHOSE RELEASE THEY MIGHT HOPE TO SECURE RANSOM CONCESSIONS. AT THE NOON BRIEFING TODAY THE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN ACCORDINGLY VOLUNTEERED NO STATEMENT ON THE MORGAN CASE BUT RESPONDED TO A NUMBER OF QUESTIONS. WE HAVE ADVISED EMBASSY BEIRUT SIMILARLY TO CONFINE ITS COMMENTS TO RESPONSES TO QUERIES. INGERSOLL

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